

First record of Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* on Tristan da Cunha, South Atlantic Ocean

by Alexander L. Bond & Trevor Glass

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Tristan da Cunha lies 2,800 km from South Africa, and >3,000 km from the coast of Brazil in the South Atlantic Ocean. It is the most remote inhabited island in the world, with St. Helena, the nearest island, >2,400 km away. Its remoteness and history of human habitation has resulted in a low diversity of terrestrial breeding birds and, because the island is not sited on any flyway, migrants are rare (Wace & Holdgate 1976, Ryan 2007). Nevertheless, there are occasional records of vagrant landbirds, mostly from the Americas. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (including *H. r. erythrogastrer*) is perhaps the commonest, with at least five records (Hagen 1952, Elliott 1953, Richardson 1984). Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* have been common in more recent years (Ryan 2007). There are also single records of Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* (Ryan 2007, 2008) and Common Nighthawk *Chordeiles minor* (Ryan 1989).

On 19 November 2015, C. Repetto, an island resident, found a weak, unfamiliar bird in her garden, and brought it to us for identification, whereupon we immediately recognised it as a Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus* (Fig. 1). The bird was dead when examined, and very emaciated, weighing 34 g, whereas typical mass is 55–70 g (Hughes 2015). Sex could not be reliably determined. The bird had replaced its two inner rectrices, while the rest were very worn; the primaries and secondaries were freshly grown, as were the wing-coverts. Measurements: total head length 50.9 mm, exposed culmen 24.7 mm, bill depth at nares 7.8 mm, tarsus 24.9 mm, straightened



Figure 1. Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*, Tristan da Cunha, 19 November 2015, showing the right side (top), spread wing (dorsal view; middle) and spread tail (dorsal view; bottom) (Alexander L. Bond)

flattened wing 146 mm and tail 140 mm. Some geographic variation in linear measurements exists among breeding populations (Banks 1988, Hughes 2015), but the Tristan da Cunha specimen's morphometrics do not appear to match those from any one region. The specimen has been deposited at the Natural History Museum, Tring (NHMUK 2016.3.1).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo is a long-distance Neotropical migrant, breeding in eastern North America, and wintering in South America, mostly east of the Andes south to Argentina (Meyer de Schauensee 1982) and Uruguay (Rappole *et al.* 1983), between October and May. There are numerous records in the Western Palearctic, mostly in September–December (Cramp 1985), from Norway (Skipnes & Folvik 1998) to France (Reeber *et al.* 2008) and Iberia (de Juana & Comité Ibérico de Rarezas de la SEO 1996). In Africa, there is a single record from Marrakech, Morocco, in October 1977 (Thévenot *et al.* 2003). There are also records from the Azores every 5–10 years, including a large influx involving several birds in 1965 (Bannerman & Bannerman 1966, Clark 2006). There are no records for sub-Saharan Africa (Dowsett & Forbes-Watson 1993, Fry *et al.* 2002, Sinclair & Ryan 2003), Ascension Island or St. Helena (Rowlands *et al.* 1998, McCulloch 2004).

The cuckoo at Tristan could have been a ship-assisted vagrant, as >700 vessels pass through the Tristan da Cunha EEZ (i.e. waters 200 nautical miles around the islands) annually, but prevailing winds on the islands are north-west, which could easily bring vagrants from South America. The bird arrived the day following a large frontal system moved west to east. This record represents the first for this genus in the Southern Hemisphere outside South America, and the sixth vagrant landbird species recorded on Tristan da Cunha.

There are few other records of vagrant *Coccyzus* spp.; most are island residents or are much less migratory (Payne 2005). The exception is Black-billed Cuckoo *C. erythrophthalmus*, another long-distance Neotropical migrant, breeding in the northern USA and southern Canada, and wintering south to Colombia, Venezuela and Peru (Hughes 2001). There are many fewer European records of this species than of Yellow-billed Cuckoo (Cramp 1985), including just one from the Azores (Hartert & Ogilvie-Grant 1905).

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Description of the nest and parental care of Spotted Tanager *Tangara punctata*

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Spotted Tanager *Tangara punctata* is a small, mainly green and black-spotted thraupid found in Venezuela, the Guianas, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and much of Amazonian Brazil (Isler & Isler 1987, Hilty 2011, Pansacula & Burns 2012). Five subspecies are recognised, with *T. p. punctata* in Amazonia and the others in the Andes (Hilty 2011, Pansacula & Burns 2012). Besides differences in plumage and habitat, a molecular study revealed significant genetic differentiation between populations from Amazonia and the Andes (Burns & Naoki 2004), suggesting that more than one species might be recognised within *T. punctata* (Pansacula & Burns 2012). In Amazonia, the species occurs in *terra firme* forest and savanna. It feeds on fruits and arthropods, mainly in the canopy, but can descend lower (Isler & Isler 1987, Hilty 2011).

Isler & Isler (1987) reported that, for most tanagers, little is known concerning basic aspects of their reproductive behaviour. For c.15 of the 49 species of *Tangara*, no information on breeding biology is available and even for the other species available data are incomplete or based on observations made in captivity (Hilty 2011). According to Pansacula & Burns (2012) many aspects of the biology of *T. punctata* are little known, and its reproductive biology wholly unknown. Here, we present the first description of a *T. punctata* nest, with notes on the egg and parental care.